



LA Family to Family Health Information Center

H1N1 and Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs

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The Louisiana Family to Family Health Information Center (F2FHIC) has received many questions regarding H1N1 and children and youth with special health care needs. In an effort to help families of children and youth with special health care needs, we have prepared the following recommendations from a variety of reliable medical and health sources.

Special Health Care Needs and H1N1

There are precautions that should be taken for all children, especially children and youth with special health care needs who may have complications in fighting H1N1. In a report published in the La EHealth News, Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals Secretary Alan Levine stated: *"If you have a child with a pre-existing medical condition, such as a respiratory or cardiac condition, diabetes or other co-occurring medical condition, please make sure your child knows to report any illness or symptoms immediately and make sure they see a physician."*

We would add that if your child is generally healthy and comes down with a cold, strep or other usual childhood illness, this could also hamper their ability to fight the H1N1 virus. Taking the precautions listed below could assist all families in the care and prevention of an H1N1 virus.

Precautions

If your child has special health needs, such as respiratory ailments, diabetes or heart conditions, or disabilities that could complicate their recovery from illness, or if your child contracts another virus such as strep or a cold during an increase of H1N1 exposures in the community, take precautions to reduce contact and exposure to H1N1. School is one of the first places children are encountering the virus. Ask what your child's school and the school district are doing to prevent exposure, promote hand washing and proper coughing and sneezing methods and to isolate any children and staff who may exhibit symptoms while at school.

Each school district has a head nurse in charge of these trainings and precautions. That might be the first place you want to start, but remind all school officials that while the general population may acquire H1N1 and recover without serious complications, children with special health needs are particularly vulnerable and may require hospitalization or experience worse if exposed to H1N1. Reducing exposure is key to children's health. Talk to your child's doctor, and the school about developing a plan to handle your child's special needs with regard to H1N1.

Preparation

Parents need to make pandemic flu preparations now. Stock up on water and other fluids that replenish your body when sick, such as canned chicken soups and broth. Stock up on any other items you normally would purchase when someone in the house is sick with the flu.

Preparing now means you won't continue to infect others if you are sick. You will also lessen your exposure to others who may be sick. You also will not have issues finding what you need if stores begin to close during an extensive outbreak and you won't be effected by shortages of the same items everyone else is looking for.

For quick access, load important phone numbers in your cell phone such as your child's physician's office, 24 hour pharmacies and pharmacies that deliver.

Talk to your child in a calm and reassuring way letting them know that they need to let you know immediately if they are feeling bad. Talk about some of the types of feelings they need to report to you. If they don't have the ability to verbalize that they are, for example, nauseated, consider speaking to your child's speech therapist about picture symbols, or signs that can be taught to them to express that they are feeling ill and what symptoms they have. Discuss with the speech therapist about adding buttons to communication devices or creating low-tech picture symbols on a special card ring that they can carry. If your child has communication delays that preclude them from communicating these symptoms, even

with assistive technology, consider speaking to your speech therapist about speech goals and teach them the language they need in order to express their health conditions if possible. Consider also meeting with your child's full team at school to discuss how your child reacts when sick if they are unable to communicate verbally or with assistive technology.

Prevention

No one has immunity to H1N1. That is why hand washing and reduced exposure is critical. Wash your hands frequently. Have your child sing the "Happy Birthday" song 2 times all the way through while washing their hands to make sure they've washed hands enough.

Use alcohol-based hand sanitizers when you can't wash your hands, but keep them in a place that is secure. They can be toxic if swallowed by children. Have children, whenever possible, cough and sneeze into tissues or into their elbow. Wash hands immediately after a sneeze or cough.

Consider household cleaners that kill viruses as well as bacteria on surfaces and keep areas like bathrooms, kitchens, doorknobs, telephones and computers clean.

The CDC is recommending that people who are at risk of complications from flu should consider staying away from public gatherings such as sporting events and concerts.

Seasonal flu vaccinations are available at some locations, Walgreens and Walmarts have it for about \$25 per shot. Some community health centers have the seasonal flu shots for \$15. Shots will be available at state public health units, but not until November. THE SEASONAL FLU VACCINE WILL NOT PROTECT YOU FROM H1N1. H1N1 is a separate vaccination and will not be available until sometime in October or November.

If Your Child Becomes Sick

CALL THE DOCTOR IMMEDIATELY. Ask the doctor if antiviral medications would have any important side effects for your child and if they are right for your child. The CDC reports that in many cases, antivirals have reduced hospitalizations and deaths. But for maximum effectiveness, antivirals should be given within the first 48 hours of onset of symptoms. This is why it's very important to call your doctor immediately. Keep your sick child in a separate room as much as possible to limit contact with other household members. Designate one person as the child's caretaker to reduce exposure at home. Keep your sick child home until at least 24 hours after your child no longer has a fever or signs of a fever without the use of fever-reducing medicines. Don't take your child out unless they are going to the doctor and have them drink lots of fluids and get plenty of rest. Do not give your child or teenager aspirin to reduce a fever as it can cause a rare but serious illness called Reye's syndrome.

EMERGENCY WARNING SIGNS

If you, your child, or anyone has any of these emergency warning signs and symptoms, SEEK URGENT MEDICAL ATTENTION:

- fast breathing, trouble breathing, shortness of breath, or stopping breathing;
- bluish, purplish, or gray skin color, especially around the lips and the inside of the mouth or around the nails;
- not drinking enough fluids, refusing to drink;
- not urinating, decreased number of wet diapers or no tears when crying;
- severe or persistent vomiting;
- not waking up or not interacting (e.g. unusually quiet and inactive, no interest in playing no interest in favorite toys);
- being so irritable that the child does not want to be held or cannot be consoled;
- pain or pressure in the chest or stomach;
- sudden dizziness;
- confusion; and
- flu-like symptoms improve, but then return with fever and worse cough.

For more information on this or other issues concerning children and youth with special health care needs, contact:

THE LOUISIANA FAMILY TO FAMILY HEALTH INFORMATION CENTER

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Facebook: La Ftofhic with updates on H1N1 and other health issues.

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